

April 1, 2022.

>> JR HARDING: Good morning, I have the privilege to be a part of you today. My name is JR Harding and I have the privilege to make remarks to the academy. I would like to thank the planning committee, Dr. Ross, Dr. Cooper, and all of you who I have not yet formally met for this invitation to speak today. I am most excited to discuss accessibility and inclusion in higher education, but first I come to you from Florida State University in Tallahassee. I am a member of the management department of the College of Business. By way of background, I am a two time quadriplegic who works two times. My teaching and research interest evolves around workforce inclusion and the abilities and passions of persons with disabilities. Personally, I live an active and full life, enjoy the outdoors, adaptive sports and traveling and been a pioneer in the public advocacy space. I share my life with my lovely wife Erica. Now on to my formal remarks. Inclusion and accessibility are like a puzzle. We must endeavor to assemble all of the pieces that result in full and independent access to all parts of life for persons with disabilities. As many of you may recall on July 26, 1990, President George H. Bush declared to the world that with his signature the Americans with Disabilities Act would let that terrible wall of exclusion come tumbling down. More over he argued, he will not excuse, he will not tolerate discrimination in America. We will provide persons with disabilities the opportunity to be blended fully and equally into the rich mosaic. This directive has become a beacon of hope and inspiration for all persons with disabilities here at home and internationally. It starts with employment. It is critical that with harness the talent of persons with disabilities with greater access and inclusion because we represent 15% of the world's population, and here in America, 61 million identify as having a disability, moreover, one in three families encounter economic and social barriers because one or more of their family members are living with a disability.

These numbers will simply continue to compound. We have measuring data on persons with disability, we measure the relationship of those with disability and without as equals for only 14 years. In truth, that's not very long, but at least we are measuring the impact of the ADA in anticipate to that aspirational

goal of inclusion without barriers. The measurement tool we've been utilizing is the current population survey or the CPS. Each month the census bureau of labor and statistics produces telling reports from their six probing questions. In truth, it took eight years to incorporate these datapoints into the metrics. As a result of this information, one constant has been true over the years, opportunities and success of individuals with and without disabilities are not equal. Employment rights for PWDs are higher than those without disabilities. The employment ratio for persons with disabilities is lower, and the employment participation rate of persons with disabilities is also lower. These outcomes do not seem to fulfill the promise of a blended, fully and equally into the mosaic of the American mainstream as President Bush proclaimed 32 years ago. That terrible wall of exclusion has not yet come tumbling down. Therefore, what obligations and what expectations and what responsibilities does that National Academy of Science, engineer, medicine have to do with the ADA and the tearing down of the walls of discrimination? As leaders within our institutions of higher Ed, federal government, and fellow Americans, we must simply lead by example. If we do not embrace this challenge who will? We must live up to our mission to teach and identify those best practices through research. We cannot forget that Higher Ed and employment opportunities have always been a springboard to economic and self sufficiency. We must endeavor to raise that bar of what full inclusion is and can be for each next generation. The ADA is an arrow found within that quiver of America, but it is only an effective tool when we choose to untap it's potential for economic and social growth. It is predicated on justice and equality and has the ability to enable anyone willing to try to achieve their highest level of self sufficiency. It has the natural ability to expand discovery, competitiveness and innovation. Are we building access and inclusion into our grants and specifically including those for the next generation. Persons with disabilities are very much like our institutions of Higher Ed, they both like to solve problems. The case and point, the Morrill Act of 1962 provided land-grants to states for the specific purpose for establishing colleges that established agricultural and -- arts. Some of these included -- later the second act of 1890 created our distinguished HBCs historical black colleges.

Collectively, these institutions make up the world's most distinguished collection of tier one universities in the world. These universities have helped to transform this country. They have helped propel us into the industrial age, build roads, bridges, and dams across the land. They have facilitated the training, education -- of education and scientists needed for this new landscape. Likewise, the GI Bill coming out of World War II was also very transformative on the growth of higher education systems. It served as a catalyst for persons with disabilities. Thanks to the regions at the University of Illinois Champagne, soldiers living with disabilities were invited and actively recruited to learn and thrive within the University culture. These early pioneers had that unique, can-do-American spirit. We saw similar change taking place at the University of California, Berkeley with Ed Roberts and the rolling quads. As a result, the country now has the Rehab Act of 1973, which specifically requires programmatic inclusion of persons with disabilities for all entities receiving federal funding. As many of you may recall at first, Ed was deemed too disabled for the VR system to work, however upon his graduation from Berkeley, the governor made Ed the -- to show that it is within the heart of an individual and not their skills (indiscernible).

I got to be the first Ed Roberts of Kentucky. I was the first student with a significant mobility impairment. We had to build ramps, sidewalks, accessible dorm rooms, implement reasonable accommodations and have faculty members learn how to incorporate me into the curriculum rather than leaving me on the sidelines of the classroom and life. During these early years, my friends of course still bounced me up and down steps, curbs, and fraternity parties and occasionally spilled me out on the concrete, but that's part of that pioneering spirit. Later Higher Ed took another significant leap forward with breaking down barriers through the passing of the ADA. This watershed legislation required all of our colleges and universities to take a deep dive into their architectural infrastructure, accommodation process, programmatic activities to ensure academic and interpersonal development of students with disabilities. Today we make up about 12.5% of the societal student population in our universities. These new tools were transformative on so many different levels. No longer would our colleges and universities be that

place just for gentleman to be trained but a place for everyone to learn, to thrive, and to make community contributions to that mosaic of the American way of life.

Each of you here today have your own unique higher education stories. Each of you will probably have that special faculty member who took the time to mentor you and guide you into your profession of choice. Like you, I'll never forget how Florida state full member accommodated me during my second spinal cord injury. I was in the middle of my dissertation data analysis, chapters four and five when I flipped my van at 75 miles an hour and broke my shoulder, both legs and my spinal cord for the second time. Yes, truly unimaginable, but it happened. The shock of the second injury caused me to lose all of my previous gained abilities that I could hardly afford to lose. My dissertation Chairperson, Dr. Barbara Mann chose to drive down to the University of Florida where I was recovering. She showed incredible empathy and concern for my well-being. She asked if I needed anything. She asked and informed me not to worry about my data and that we would get the dissertation completed. I told Dr. Mann that I would like to work on my dissertation from the rehab room, and with this charge, the University community figured out how to beam my dissertation from my dorm room to the University server to another University server and specifically to my hospital room, which was outfitted with an adaptive computer to meet my needs. This was done in the summer of 1998 and this was done before we had Google. In solving this problem, they took reasonable accommodation to a whole new level. This was only possible because universities were on the cutting-edge of technology. They had just introduced the ethernet connection to enable large amounts of data to be sent back and forth on this thing called the internet. I was able to finish my dissertation just two months behind my original goal despite all of that physical and mental damage to my body. Because of this level of student-centered instruction and commitment, I am gainfully employed and have been so for well over twenty plus years. In fact, I am making a planned gift to some of my universities to ensure that the next generation of students with disabilities are able to benefit from the teaching and the research and service opportunities they might encounter at their

school of choice. So how do we show our leadership? How do we continue to use our universities and colleges as economic and social change agents? How do we specifically meet the needs of our marginalized population that are facing attitudinal, structural, programmatic communication and financial barriers into education and work? Well, building upon that puzzle metaphor we must assemble all the pieces of our tools to mitigate barriers. Those tools include but not limited to physical access, programmatic access information technology, relationships, mentoring and much more. I like to use the four A's as a teaching tool to empower my students to build a more robust workforce in the future. The four A's are: Start with the right attitude, build that access, have those accommodation tools, and assimilate everyone into your teams this. Approach is driven by that inclusion framework found on the employer assistance framework. The framework is uniquely tailored to assist almost all individuals on the diversity spectrum with inclusion needs. I ask each of you, what are you doing to promote the right attitudes, to ensure the proper infrastructure, to promote reasonable accommodations within your labs, your research, your exams and so forth? How are you assimilating the next generation into the professions of science, engineer, medicine? Are you leading the way? Are you building a pipeline of talent in your field? Are you communicating inclusive practices utilizing accessibility technology, and ultimately, are you measuring the impacts of your part of the world into the greater system. When will each of you see and understand that my mobility device is not who I am but just how I get around? I am defined by many different characteristics and interests. None of us are singular in our perspectives. Our differences are not our weaknesses but rather our strengths. We, persons with disabilities, have a lifetime of solving problems. It is this kind of tenacity, this kind of innovative thinking, this kind of persistence that will help us continue to build a knowledge base community for today and tomorrow. After all, living with a disability is not a constant, it is an ever-evolving concept that has the intersectionality across ages, genders, religions, identities. If we live all enough, we will all encounter some type of disabling condition. Many of us have already begun this journey of living with a disability. Perhaps some of you use glasses or hearing aids to accommodate

your own particular needs. How many of you are demanding that your new state of the art research facilities are -- let's maximize. Each of our new facilities across our universities will be here 50-100 years -- how many of you are currently using accessible features on your iPhone, your computer, the environmental controls built-in your home? Are you creating accessible documents for your syllabi, your research papers, are you communicating them in a manner that individuals can read them freely and independently on any device at any time? Are you advancing inclusion as defined by the social model of inclusion rather than reinforcing the archaic biases built into the medical model of living with a disability? As each of you are aware, one model places the burden of advocacy and accommodation on the individual living with the disability rather than placing the reasonable expectations on our institutions, our businesses and communities to remove the barriers from full and active life. The 2010 standards are creating new expectations, opening previously closed doors like the outdoors and amusement parks: These universal design standards have been improved upon since 1990 and 1992. Science and technology is now driving a more functional and purposely constructive environment. Things like lever door handles and curb cuts. Remember everyone complained about them, but now none of us can live without them. The workforce investment opportunity act of 2014. Allowing us to reach out to young people with disabilities and requires our nation's largest contractors to meet the 7% aspirational work force goals. Federal government -- 12% and recruiting those with impairments like quadriplegia, Downs and the like. Everyone with a disability can work in integrated and competitive environments, integrated and competitive environments. Soon many of our not for profits will be able to use the 14c waiver to support and drive sheltered workshops. They will need to pay individuals with disabilities the minimum wage or higher, competitive and integrated. Soon we will have to absorb thousands of new employees into the broader mosaic of the American life when previously they were told they were less able. Perhaps we are the one who is less able because we lack the vision, the compassion, the understanding, and the ability to raise that bar. Thank you and I appreciate being with you today.